

潮浪群雄

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那些做電影的人

小莊
Sean ChuangLocal Heroes
Taiwan New Wave Cinema

Local Heroes: Taiwan New Wave Cinema

潮浪群雄 1

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In the 1980s, Taiwan New Wave cinema gained global acclaim at festivals like Cannes and Venice, sparking a cinematic revolution not only in Taiwan but across the global film landscape.

After decades of authoritarian rule, Taiwan began to open up. The public thirst for high-quality entertainment posed a serious challenge to the stodgy Taiwan's Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMP), a film studio closely tied to the ruling Kuomintang (KMT) party.

This is a story that dramatizes how industry outsiders reshaped one of Taiwan's most conservative film studios into an art-cinema powerhouse. Ming Ji, the general manager of CMP, made a bold move by hiring two gifted artists to breathe new life into the company. He recruited Wu Nien-jen, an independent screenwriter still completing his accounting degree in night school, and Hsiao Yeh, a part-time novelist who paused his PhD studies in the United States to return to Taiwan. The results were remarkable: Taiwan New Wave won global acclaim.

But what took place at CMP during those transformative years? How did these newcomers manage to produce such groundbreaking work amidst bureaucratic corporate culture and state censorship?

This book is an intimate account of the birth of the Taiwan New Wave, capturing the spirit and vision of revolutionary filmmakers. Sean Chuang, a renowned artist, collaborates with some of Taiwan's greatest directors to understand the political and social atmosphere of 1980s Taiwan. In this story, idealism triumphs over ideology, authenticity over propaganda, and artistic freedom over censorship.

Local Heroes: Taiwan New Cinema is the first of a five-volume series that documents Taiwan's New Wave cinema of the 1980s.



Sean Chuang

Sean Chuang is a renowned advertising director, comics book author, and illustrator. He has been honored with multiple awards, among them the Times Advertising Award and the Asia-Pacific Advertising Award. His comic book *Memoirs of an Ad Man* set a publishing record of eighteen editions. *80's Diary in Taiwan* won the Golden Comic Award for "Best Comic of the Year" and Youth Comic Award. *Chuang's Etudes for Papa* was nominated for the Golden Comic Award's Youth Comic Award. He has collaborated with novelist Wu Mingyi to create an illustrated edition of *The Illusionist on the Skywalk* and has been exhibited at festivals across the world, including multiple times at the Angoulême International Comics Festival.

Dedicated to the Movie Makers: A Word from Sean Chuang

Written by Sean Chuang

Translated by Joshua Dyer

In 1982, while I was still in middle school, I stumbled across a copy of the Taiwanese movie *In Our Time* in a pile of boisterous Hong Kong movies.

At the time my impression of Taiwanese films was that of a complete mess. Schools gave free showings of patriotic movies like *Eight Hundred Heroes* and *Everlasting Glory*, while commercial movies were about gambling, “social realist dramas,” or salacious tales of vengeance populated by gangsters and their molls. Their suggestively eye-catching posters were pasted pell-mell on the blank walls I passed on the way to school. If I mentioned Taiwan films to my elders, they would reply by shaking their heads with derision.

My father would only take me to see foreign films, explaining that they were more “authentic.” Based on that single word, I established my cinematic

standard. Domestic productions at the time were generally overdubbed in painfully exacting Mandarin, and the image quality was rigid and grainy. The plots were completely disconnected from real life, like watching a stage play. I readily adopted my father’s view that the higher quality foreign films were the luxury goods of the cinema marketplace.

Later, in the VHS era, video stores were buzzing with word-of-mouth recommendations for *Growing Up*. I watched it with my brother and found it moving, so we dragged our mother out to see it. She had the ability to become completely emotionally invested in TV dramas, so I wanted to see if a Taiwanese film could also get her waterworks going. My mother, a woman with zero faith in the domestic film industry, tears streaming down her cheeks, declared, “It’s fantastic! It really tugs at the heart strings!”

As far as I can recall, that was the first Taiwanese movie that felt “authentic” to me. The characters, the story, the way they talked—it all seemed like the sort of thing I observed all around me in daily life.

Years later I was working in the film industry and had the good fortune to have brief but rewarding encounters with

directors such as Hou Hsiao-hsien, Wu Nien-jen, and Ko I-chen, and the great film editor Liao Ching-Sung. Just observing the passion and intelligence they brought to their work was an education. I began to develop a deep admiration for that generation of movie makers. They were a community of idealistic risk-takers, always lending a hand in each other’s projects. Only then, after my curiosity was finally piqued, did I go back and watch all those movies I had missed out on before—the same movies my friends had told me were “pretty dull” in my younger days.

Those movies we all thought were dull

now seethed with subtle power. Even contemporary filmmakers would have struggled to match their depth of insight. It defies the imagination that movies made decades ago, often under difficult circumstances, are still being discussed in international film circles today.

After watching some documentaries and reading about the history of the Taiwan New Wave, I began to understand both the course of its development and its impact. But I was curious how this group of young movie makers had managed to achieve so much, as they worked within an authoritarian system that discouraged independent thought.

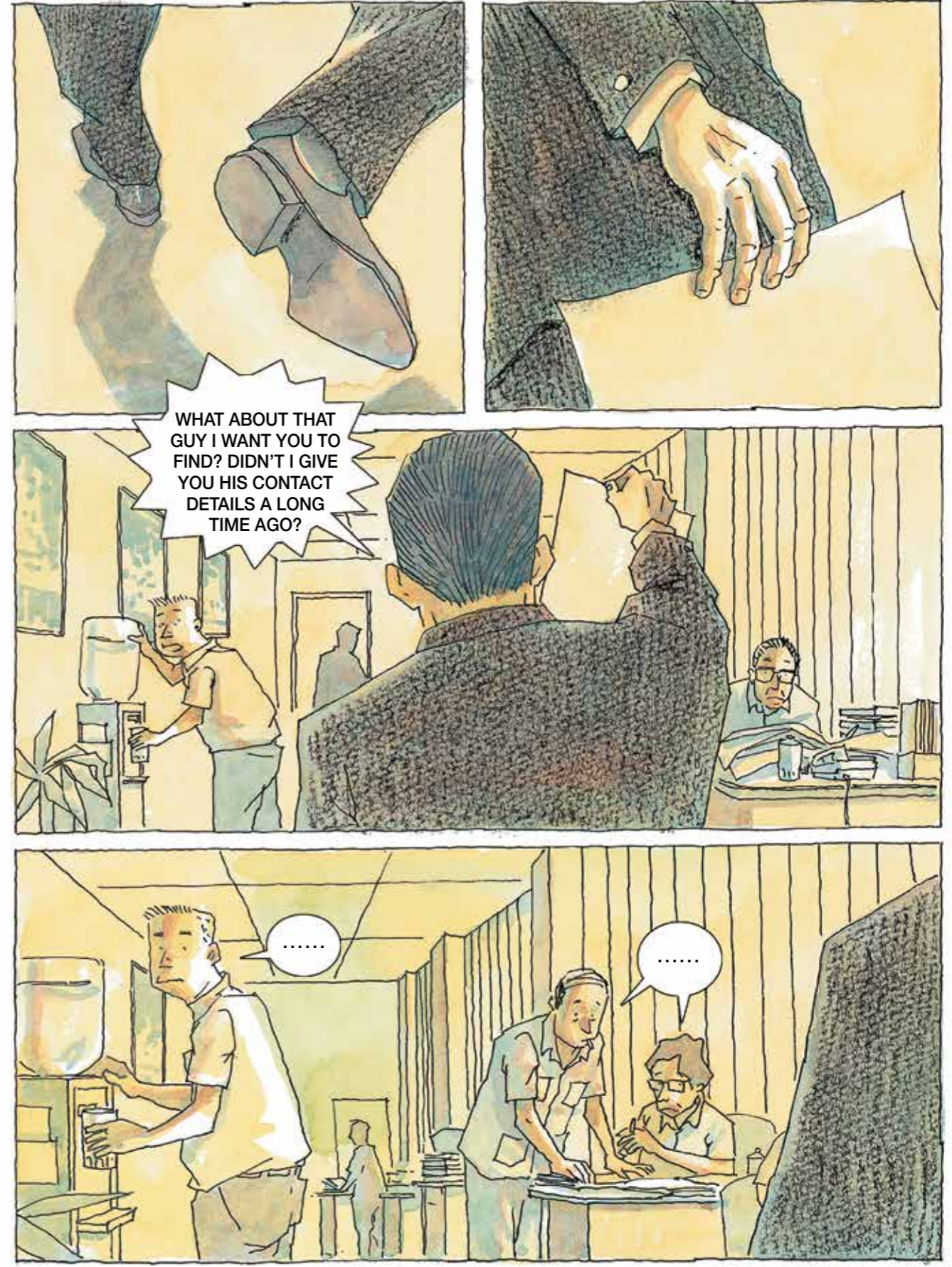
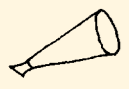
With the lifting of martial law still years in the future, many of them had worked directly inside the official media organizations of the KMT, the ruling political party. What were their thoughts in those times? What did they experience?

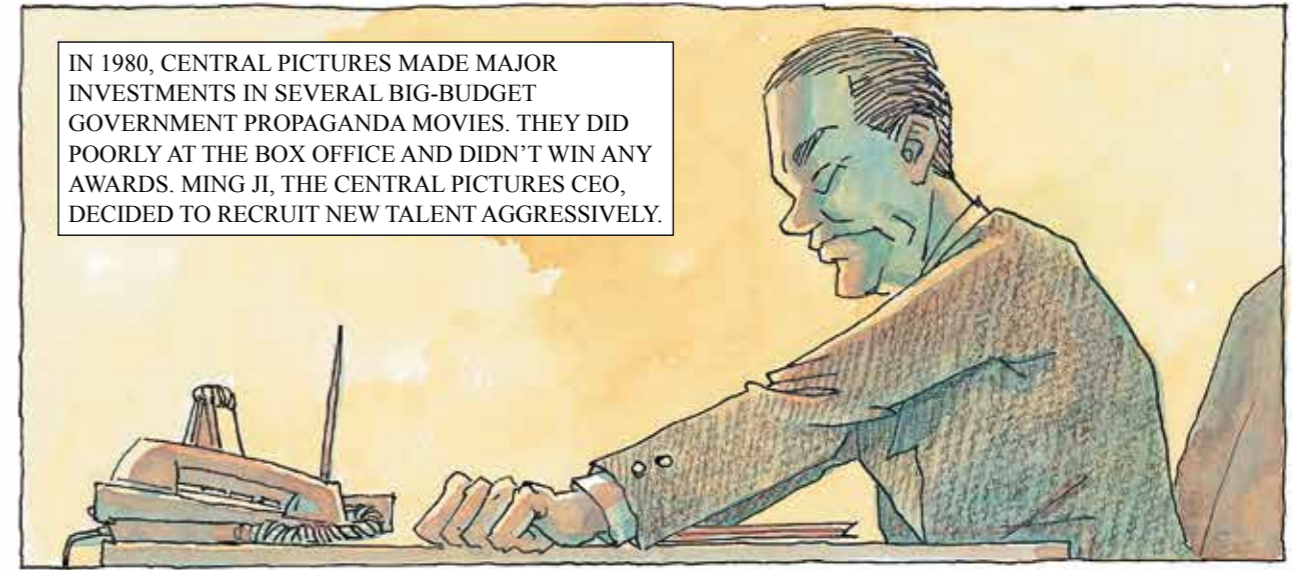
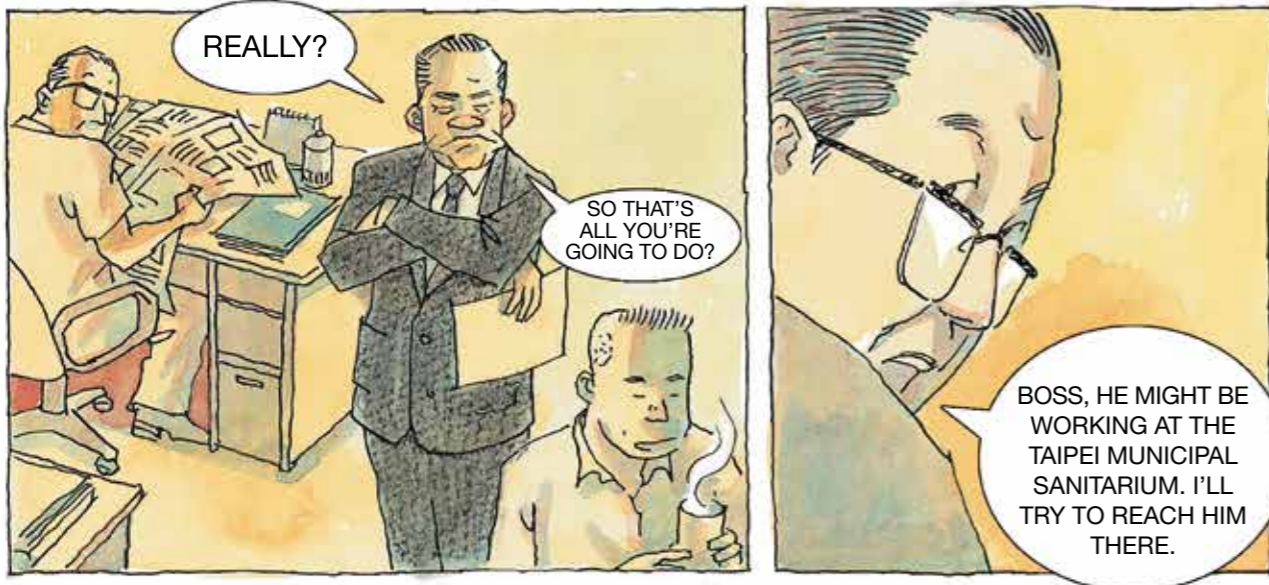
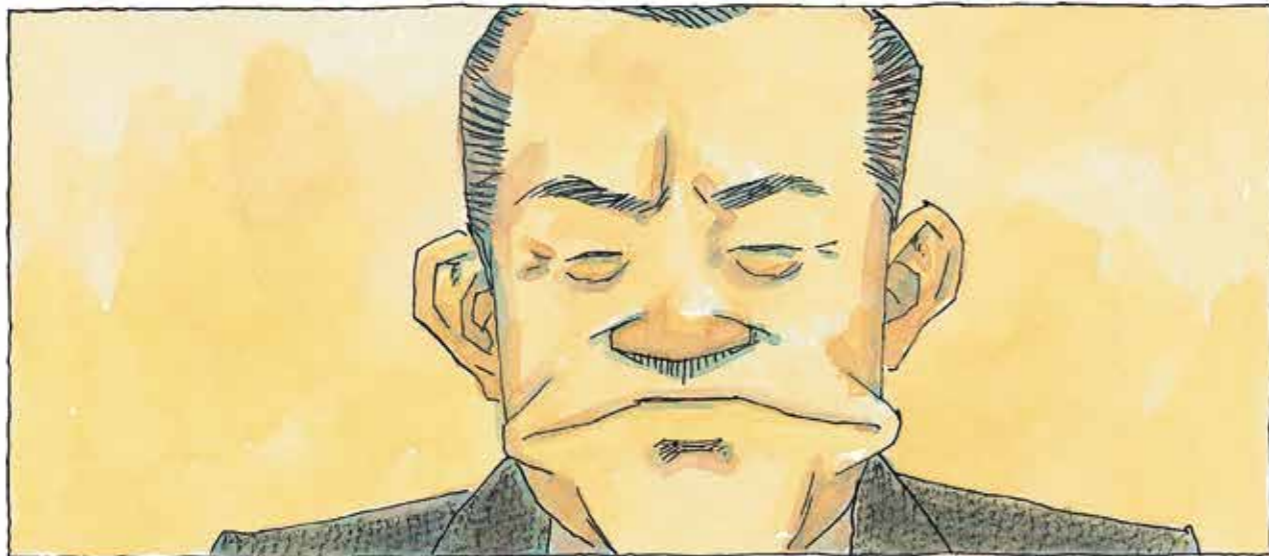
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TAIPEI, 1980







TAIPEI MUNICIPAL SANITARIUM

HELLO? WHO ARE YOU TRYING TO REACH? WU NIEN-JEN?

WHO ARE YOU? CENTRAL PICTURE?



BOSS MING. YES, IT'S ME. I'M WU.



WORK AT CENTRAL PICTURES?

PLEASE SIGN HERE.

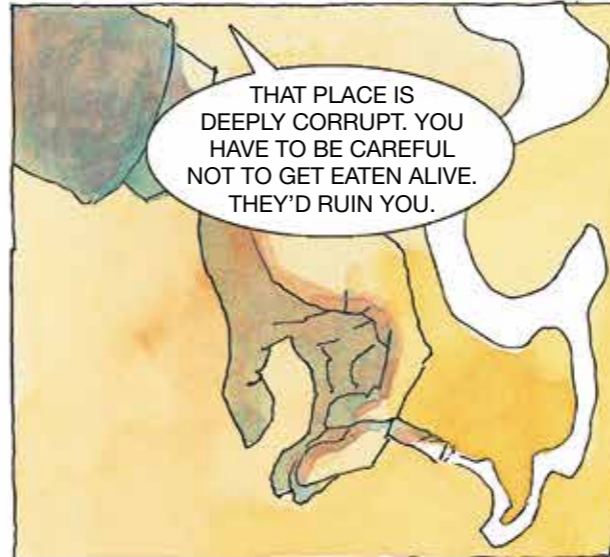


I'M SORRY. I ALREADY HAVE A JOB WORKING AT THE HOSPITAL.



YOU'RE THAT FAMOUS? CENTRAL PICTURES CALLED THE HOSPITAL LOOKING FOR YOU?

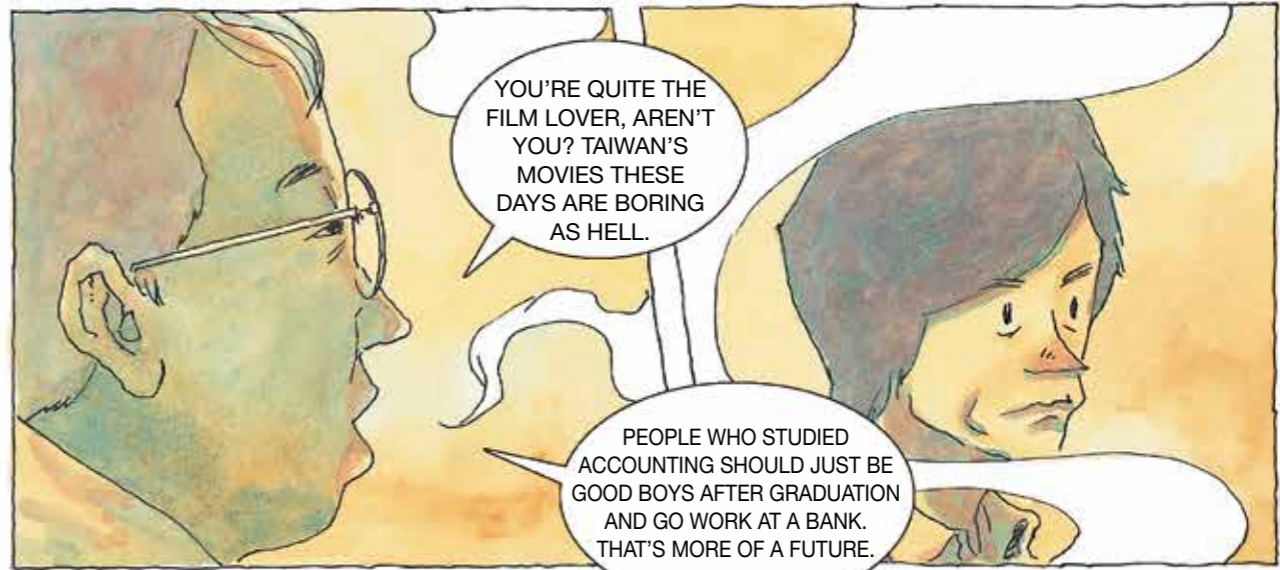
GO WORK IN THE PARTY-STATE MACHINE? YOU'VE GOT TO BE KIDDING ME.



THAT PLACE IS DEEPLY CORRUPT. YOU HAVE TO BE CAREFUL NOT TO GET EATEN ALIVE. THEY'D RUIN YOU.



THAT'S RIGHT. YOU'RE AN ARTY HIPSTER.



YOU'RE QUITE THE FILM LOVER, AREN'T YOU? TAIWAN'S MOVIES THESE DAYS ARE BORING AS HELL.

PEOPLE WHO STUDIED ACCOUNTING SHOULD JUST BE GOOD BOYS AFTER GRADUATION AND GO WORK AT A BANK. THAT'S MORE OF A FUTURE.